

## HAND MEDITATION

Close your eyes, have your hands resting in your lap, palms up. Tune into your breathing, relax. Let your breathing relax all of you. Experience your whole body smiling. Feel how good it is to be here, now, and have nothing to do but BE. Become aware of the air at your fingertips, between your fingers, on the palm of your hands, think of the most unforgettable hands you have known - the hands of your father, your mother, your grandparents. Remember the oldest hands that have rested in your hands. Think of the hands of a new born child - or the incredible, beauty, perfection, delicacy in the hands of a child. Once upon a time your hands were the same size.

Think of all that your hands have done since then. Almost all that you have learned has been through your hands - turning yourself over, crawling and creeping, walking and balancing yourself; learning to hold something for the first time, feeding yourself, washing and bathing; dressing yourself. At one time your greatest accomplishment was tying your own shoes. Think of all the learning your hands have done and how many activities they have mastered, the things they have made. Remember the day you could write your own name...

Our hands were not just for ourselves but for others. How often they were given to help another. Remember all the kinds of work they have done, the tiredness and aching they have known, the cold and the heat, the soreness and the bruises. Remember the tears they have wiped away, our own or another's, the blood they have bled, the healing they have experienced. How much hurt, anger, and even violence they have expressed, and how much gentleness, tenderness and love they have given.

How often they have been folded in prayer; both a sign of their powerlessness and of their power. Our father and mother guided these hands in the great symbolic language of our hands - the sign of the cross, and the striking of our breast, and handshake, the wave of the hand in 'hello' or 'goodbye'. There is a mystery which we discover in the hand of woman or the hand of a man that we love. There are the hands of a doctor, a nurse, an artist, a conductor, a priest, hands which you can never forget.

Now raise your right hand slowly and gently place it over your heart. Press more firmly until your hand picks up the beat of your heart, that most mysterious of all human sounds, one's own heartbeat, a rhythm learned in the womb from the heartbeat of one's mother. Press more firmly for a moment and then release your hand and hold it just a fraction from your clothing. Experience the warmth between your hand and your heart. Now lower your hand to your lap very carefully as if it were carrying your heart. For it does. When you extend your hand to another it is not just bone and skin, it is your heart. A handshake is the real heart transplant.

Think of all the hands that have left their imprint on you. Finger prints and handprints and heartprints that can never be erased. The hand has its own memory. Think of all the places that carry your handprints and all the people who bear your heartprint. They are indelible and will last forever.

Now without opening your eyes extend your hands on either side and find another hand. Do not simply hold it but explore it and sense the history and mystery of this hand. Let your hand speak to it and let it listen to the dark and then bring your hand back again to your lap. Experience the presence of that hand lingering upon your hand. The afterglow will fade but the print is there forever. Whose hand was that? It could have been any hand; it could have been His hand. It was. He has no other hands than ours.